

# *Displacements of Identity in Palestine/Israel:*

Edward Said and Jean Mohr

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The confrontation between Israel and the native population of Palestine is an instance of a democratic population generating its other through practices of dispossession and displacement. The dispossessions are clear to see, but the displacements—physical, spiritual, political, ethical—are more subtle and have all but foreclosed the possibility of recognition between the two communities, particularly the identification of one's self in one's other that would seem prerequisite to a functional politics.<sup>1</sup> One significant displacement has been shifting the consequences of the history of Jewish suffering onto the non-Jewish population of Palestine. Rather than a recognition of two human populations with histories of suffering, the encounter is moved from the general ground of shared humanity to the more particularized ground of identity, where one population has



Jean Mohr, A few days after the Six-Day War, an Israeli officer considers an ICRC proposal, under the gaze of a Palestinian boy, Kalandia village between Jerusalem and Ramallah, 1967. © ICRC/MOHR, Jean.

a decided advantage due to its power and given the current state of geo-political dynamics. This move allows the well-established Jewish identity to move aside Palestinians, whose identity presumably must be proven in spite of their presence. While in the short term the move to identity cements the power differential between the two communities, the shift has implications for members of both, and for the possibilities of any kind of humane politics.

The Palestinian experience of occupation necessarily drives Palestinians to their own interiors, physically and psychically, away from possible engagement with Israelis, even those sympathetic to their plight. In *After the Last Sky*, Edward Said's text that accompanies photographs by Jean Mohr, the writer offers an impressionistic chronicle of what it means to be Palestinian by examining the effects of occupation on the everyday lives of Palestinians. In this work, we see the deconstructed community resist its consignment to non-existence by reconstructing itself, not in terms of identity, but rather in terms of presence. Mohr's and Said's Palestinians resist by simply being in place; theirs is the simple but undeniable presence of people living their lives under constant threat of disruption or dispossession.

The power dynamic in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is nowhere better demonstrated than in how it has been cast in terms of whether or what a "Palestinian" is, and whether such an identity constitutes the basis for establishing a "nation-state." For Palestinians, the stakes could not be higher: the idea is that in order to be taken seriously as a community worthy of agency or human rights protections, for instance, a community must have an established, recognized identity.<sup>2</sup> Over against claims that Palestinians, as Golda Meir put it, do not exist, the presence of Palestinians has not been so easily overcome. All identities are complexes of history, traditions, and culture, but in the case of Palestinians, Edward Said notes that the project of identity is one in which Palestinians are more often "written" by others. "[I]t is not as if no one speaks about or portrays the Palestinians," he writes. "The difficulty is that everyone, including the Palestinians themselves, speaks a great deal." Consequently, he writes, the field "is a terribly crowded place, almost too crowded for what it is asked to bear by way of history or interpretation of history."<sup>3</sup>

Being written by others is a difficult starting point from which to establish political or religious agency, particularly when those others have a vested interest in making one disappear. In setting out the arguments against Palestinian wholeness, David Margolis suggests that arguments like Meir's reflect the normative argument of a nation-state.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Alan Godlas suggests that the notion of a state "does not necessarily have to exclude heterological, diverse, conflicting, or multi-cultural

voices (such as those which comprise the Palestinian or American identities)."<sup>5</sup> As in any multifaceted context, the question of identity involves tensions between "traditional heritage and modern practices." In that way, he notes,

Palestinians, like Arabs in general, are Christians, Maronite Catholics, Shi'i and Sunni Muslims, [and Druze] and areligious and/or atheistic modernists and post-modernists. Like Americans, they have both sub-national identities as well as a national identity (although it would be more correct to state that they have a national identity to which they aspire, since forces outside of themselves have been focused on thwarting their national aspirations).<sup>6</sup>

The consequence of this thwarting is that Palestinians are forced to define themselves in ways that other groups have not been asked to do, rendering them vulnerable to erasure—discursively and physically.<sup>7</sup> To overcome this kind of erasure, Said offers *After the Last Sky*, in which he creates a text, accompanied by photographs, which together function to make real a people whom others want to disappear with "no remains." The text is both multi-vocal—containing Said's voice and that of others he is careful to preserve—and inter-textual—as word and photograph overlay like transparencies transforming genre. As such, the text is an invitation to the reader and viewer to both listen to (the word) and to construct (the images') meaning.

The interplay of image and text in *After the Last Sky* marks a presence that resists definition. Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* offers a hermeneutic for the way Said uses photographs in the project.<sup>8</sup> Barthes is fascinated by photography—by how it both irrupts time and death and records time and death at the same time. Photographs, Barthes suggests, are modern, and have a democratic quality, unlike the portrait or miniature in previous times, which signified class.<sup>9</sup> Like the modern democratic ethos they reflect, photographs stand at the border between the public and the private: "Each photograph is read as the private appearance of its referent: the age of Photography corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private into the public, or rather the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publically."<sup>10</sup>

Like Said, Barthes uses words and pictures—that is, two kinds of testimonials. For Barthes—as in *After the Last Sky*—photographs both ratify and authenticate<sup>11</sup>: "Every photograph is a certificate of presence."<sup>12</sup> The photograph marks presence both in space and time. Photographs are part of their time, what Barthes calls the *studium*, the elements of the photograph that open up to the time and place of

its composition, but, through the viewer, they are also part of our present. They challenge our desire to deny the other, the denial that the “thing has been there.”<sup>13</sup> In challenging our denial, photographs, through what he calls the *punctum*, the detail that “pierces the reader,” manage to shock us and to activate thought. They unsettle what we thought we knew or what we had considered established. A photograph can astonish, and that astonishment can endure and renew<sup>14</sup> as the photograph fills the sight—and the memory and affective consciousness<sup>15</sup>—“by force.”<sup>16</sup>

The photograph, Barthes argues, creates an encounter, not mere memory. Indeed, a photograph may interrupt the ways we want to remember, may block memory, and may “quickly [become] counter-memory.”<sup>17</sup> It has the capacity to interrupt and suspend narrative flow and the movement of time towards any teleology. It can also endure after a *telos* has been reached, that is, after death. To be sure, we can resist this power.<sup>18</sup> Barthes recognizes that we can throw photographs away or just consume them banally: “Such are the two ways of the Photograph. The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality.”<sup>19</sup> The latter is what Said hopes we will do in viewing the photographs in *After the Last Sky*.

For a people remembered or, better still, dismembered through the words and ideas of others, the photograph, as Barthes describes its power, is the perfect medium for communicating the Palestinian experience.<sup>20</sup> Through photograph and text, Said locates Palestinian identity in the discontinuous mode of living into which Palestinians have been forced. “We are,” he argues, “migrants and perhaps hybrids in, but not of any situation in which we find ourselves.” Mohr’s photographs, by and large, are not of atrocity, but of ordinary people. Most are of faces, many of children, working as “proof” that Palestinians do exist.<sup>21</sup> Through these images, and with them, Said narrates his own and the Palestinian story. It is a story, despite its being endlessly narrated, of a fragmentation so complex that it neither has nor needs a “straight narrative.” “For where no straight line leads from home to birthplace to school to maturity,” Said notes, “all events are accidents, all progress is a digression, all residence is exile.”<sup>22</sup>

Such a fracturing requires another mode of telling.<sup>23</sup> The photographs and Said’s own story constitute a testimony made up of scraps of things, like deeds to land to which a family will never return, photographs, and other possessions that crowd spaces and lives.<sup>24</sup> Mohr’s photos draw Said inside where Palestinian homes symbolize identity.<sup>25</sup> The excesses pictured in the homes in the book, Said suggests, reflect the congested quality of the land.<sup>26</sup> They also reflect the complexity of identity

with which the Palestinian must live: always facing out, with no center or tone.<sup>27</sup> Hence, Said argues, Palestinians “reproduce” themselves in new spaces. To the world, they are always other to the identity Israel has constructed, always reduced to a simple vocabulary: “enemies of the Jews.”<sup>28</sup> If it is the peculiar Palestinian predicament that their presence in Palestine is narrated by others, to have what it means to be Palestinian dependent upon others, Said wonders, then how can the Palestinians write a history, decide what to preserve and what to abandon and, given these circumstances, create a “workable dialectic of self and other.”<sup>29</sup>

The “characteristic mode” of Palestinian life, as Said puts it, “is not narrative, in which scenes take place *seriatim*, but rather broken narratives, fragmentary compositions, and self-consciously staged testimonials, in which the narrative voice keeps stumbling over itself, its obligations, and its limitations.”<sup>30</sup> The ideas of composition, of staging, are terms deeply affiliated with photography—self-consciously chosen by Said for that reason. In their way, the images in *After the Last Sky* offer a counter to the linearity we expect from narrative. Where narrative as text can be constructed to impose continuity on that which may otherwise lack it, photographs can be seen as a different kind of narrative device. They are, as Ariella Azoulay points out, episodic, momentary, but also universal in that they resist single readings.<sup>31</sup>

Presence, however, carries its own weight, a counter-weight to the absence of “identity.” Said, in discussing a series of photographs of Palestinian shepherds and women in the fields, notes that those images “seem saturated with a kind of inert being that outweighs anything they express; consequently, they invite the embroidery of explanatory words.”<sup>32</sup> Mohr’s photographic representations, Said argues, are “the culmination of a sequence of capturings”<sup>33</sup> in which what is captured is the work of life and survival—a father and child at a medical clinic, men working on combustion engines, women tending to children, and scenes of households or working in the fields. Therefore, Mohr’s photographs are not staged in the usual sense, but rather are demonstrations of the degree to which the photographer really does not control that which he captures. The lives of the subjects are responses to conditions generated by others, so the staging comes from outside forces generating lives of what Judith Butler calls “precarity” under occupation.<sup>34</sup> The series of photographs of Palestinian peasants working reveal them, Said argues, to be “the creatures of a half a dozen other processes, none of which leaves these productive human beings with their labor intact.”<sup>35</sup> It is their unselfconscious response to these conditions, the assertion of “inert being,” that is the site of Palestinian identity, and that gives this identity a universal character.



Jean Mohr, *Peasant women in Irbid*, 1950.  
© Jean Mohr, Musée de l'Elysée Lausanne

The way Said's text organizes Mohr's photographs speaks to his awareness of the impossibility of writing the Palestinian story in a straight, narrative line. The chapter titles, "States," "Interiors," "Emergence," and "Past and Future" frame Palestinian experience—including Said's own story as distinct from the metropole—not as a timeline but rather as a series of impressions befitting a people who lack the luxury of being settled in place. Said often wrote of the exile as having a double home and a double identity. Recognizing that he may never be able to return to his Palestinian home, Said deploys the notion of a "fugitive" or "outlaw" identity,<sup>36</sup> one cut off from the past such that memory is the only "place" that geography can exist.<sup>37</sup> What connects the Palestinian to place—modern things like telephones, planes, etc.—only connect them to the place of exile, not to the place of origin. This creates more than a double consciousness; it raises the question of how to write a legitimate future on what is called an illegitimate history. Said writes:

What I have found is that if you seize on all the evidence that appears intermittently—another massacre, one more betrayal, a damaging defeat—you can easily construct the plot of a logically unfolding conspiracy against us. Like all paranoid constructions, this one could add up to a whole thing ('could' is a conditional word) if the 'normal' world cooperated. But our narratives in general have little official or recognized status; few people have given us the privilege of even having a narrative, much less of publicizing it; as outlaws we are always so censored and interdicted that we seem able only to get occasional messages through to an indifferent outside world.<sup>38</sup>

If Palestinian presence cannot be articulated in the usual narrative frame, as a linear progression, telling the story of the development of a people's culture over time, its discontinuity, owing largely to uninvited outside influences, must nonetheless be adapted to on the inside. The Palestinian story necessarily lurches from one state of being, from one place of being, to the next, certain only of what is close-at-hand and, correspondingly, of both its solidity and its impermanence.

Not only are Palestinians denied a linear narrative, their presence disrupts another one. Palestinians, Said argues, are the unwanted and discontinuous presence complicating the linear narrative of return of European Jews to their Promised Land and to security. As such, they are under constant pressure to disappear, to go away—to let history march on its way. Yet, as Barthes claims, the photographs here attest to the Palestinian presence before, during, and after the establishment of Israel. In order not to disappear into someone else's history, Palestinians, Said says, must live by the repetition that is everyday life. The presence illustrated by photo and text is marked by repetition both of the necessary and the obvious, beginning with the fact that they are and have been present in this space. Articulating presence as repetition emerges as no small task for a people who, Said argues, have lost the sense of space. The impermanence of dwelling places, their fragility, makes Palestinians distrust any space exterior to themselves, but the distrust does not prevent them from emerging into those spaces. Homes, fields, towns are all covers for the inevitability of loss without return. Yet, he insists, this condition has produced "an energetic consciousness that there are still chores to be done, children to be raised, houses to be lived in, despite our anomalous circumstances."<sup>39</sup>

While the circumstances they depict and describe are unsettled, Mohr's images and Said's reflections upon them reveal that Palestinian presence, their inert being, is grounded in what Said calls the "privilege of obduracy": "we are," he writes, "unmoved by your power, proceeding with our lives and with future generations. . . . These statements of presence," Said concludes, "are fundamentally silent, but they occur with unmistakable force."<sup>40</sup> This obduracy manifests itself in work, in play—that is to say, in proceeding as if settled without the possibility of realizing that condition. The focus on work and presence is an early indication of what will become Said's lack of faith in relying upon political solutions or approaches to the Palestinian future.<sup>41</sup>

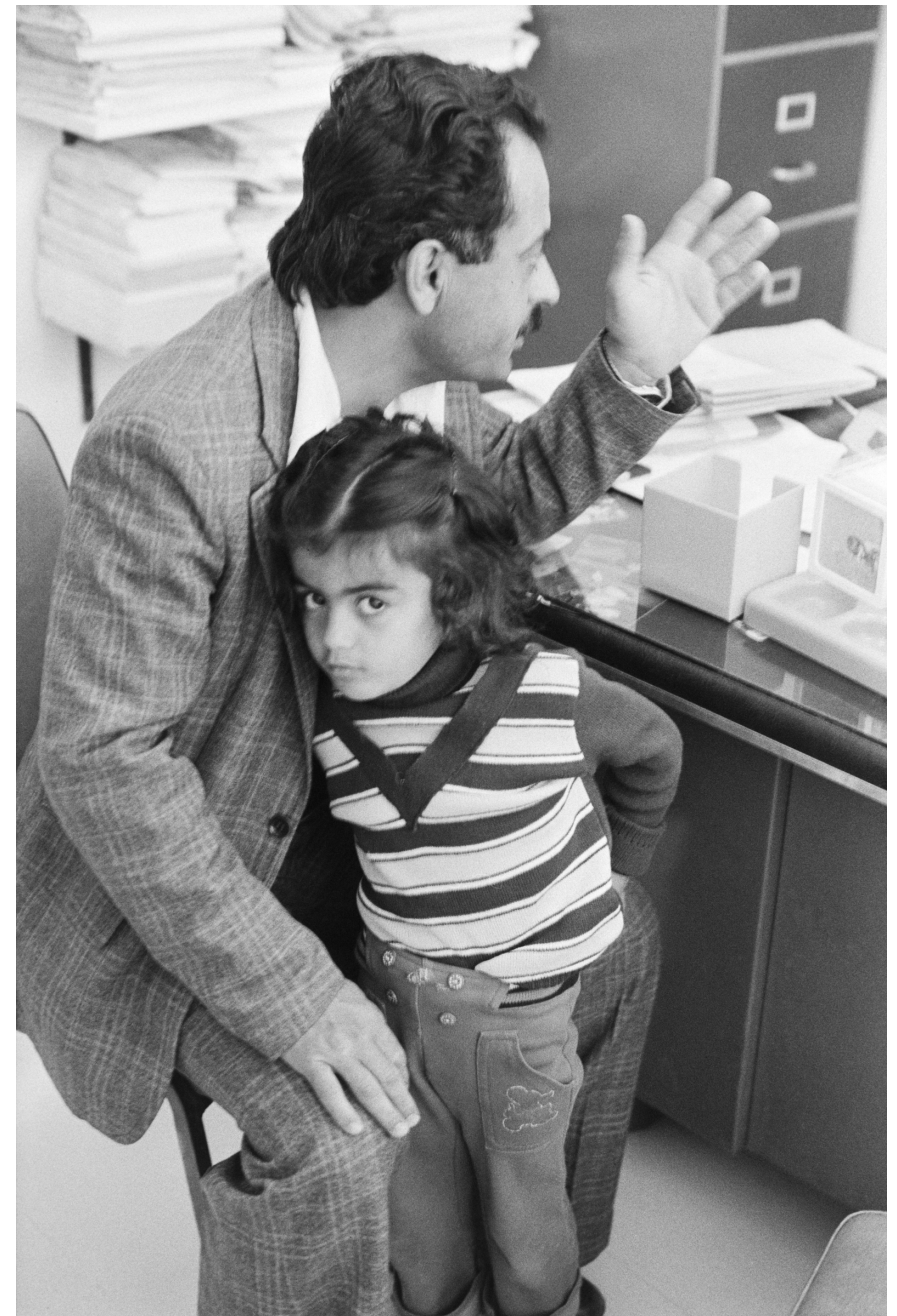
Said's gesture to future generations clearly derives from Mohr's pictures of adults with children in *After the Last Sky*. These photographs testify to the transformation of obduracy or "inert being" into a kind of continuity in defiance of circumstance and they do so in a way that the missing narrative cannot. Two photos from the



“States” section of the book are exemplary. The first was taken in Amman, Jordan, in 1984, and is called *Pediatric Clinic*.<sup>42</sup> A father and child are at the doctor’s office. While the father talks, gesturing to someone behind a desk, his daughter leans against him and looks out at the camera. Said reads the photograph as giving a glimpse of “a much more fugitive but ultimately quite beautifully represented and subtle, sense of identity” as it speaks “in languages not yet formed.”<sup>43</sup> The father gestures with his left hand to the unrepresented person behind the desk. We assume he is arguing for something for his child’s care, seeking an “official” response in a world in which he has no place in the system.<sup>44</sup> In Palestine, Said argues, the simple relationship between father and child is both political—the image of those dispossessed by violence—as well as symbolic and religious, inevitably entangled with monotheisms and its promises of ongoing relationship—“Christian Incarnation and Resurrection, the Ascension to heaven of the Prophet Mohammed, the Covenant of Yahweh with his people.”<sup>45</sup>

Yet, its message is simple as well. The young girl leans confidently on her father, her head against his chest, as someone who loves her, who is her protector and advocate in the midst of uncertainty. This image of love between parent and child witnesses to complexity, yes, but also to ongoing presence: the child insures the future, tenuous as her hold on it may be. The unconditional love in the father-daughter relationship here signifies something stable in the midst of uncertainty and bureaucracy. Perhaps that is why the daughter, though clearly shy, can look the stranger, the photographer, in the eye, just as her father looks the bureaucrat in the eye.

A second telling photograph graces the upper left hand corner of the paperback edition of *After the Last Sky* (see page 54).<sup>46</sup> Mohr took the picture in June 1967 near Ramallah after Moshe Dayan’s successful Six Day War against Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. The photograph, at first glance, could be a father and son. But the caption explains that it is of an Israeli officer and a young village boy. What is striking is that the victor seems more destroyed in the photograph than the defeated. The boy, head tilted, looks with serious but confident eyes through a window at the photographer. The fingertips of his right hand touch the glass. The Israeli officer, who is probably an administrator in the area, which is in the West Bank, north of Jerusalem, looks deeply preoccupied and troubled, eyes downcast, with his left hand pressed against his face. The hands of the boy and the man constitute a pair of hands. We could almost imagine the boy touching the hand of the Israeli if he reached through the window. They are separated yet intimately connected. The boy, who is standing in light, dominates the photograph. Like the little girl with her father, the boy constitutes a presence not erased by war, a presence that projects



Jean Mohr, Amman, 1984. *Pediatric Clinic*  
© Jean Mohr, Musée de l'Elysée Lausanne

itself into the future—yet one avoided by the Israeli officer. In the narrative, Said suggests this continuity: “Could it be that even as alien outsiders we dog their military might with our obdurate moral claim, our insistence (like that of Bartelby the Scrivener) that ‘we would prefer not to,’ not to leave, not abandon Palestine forever?”<sup>47</sup>

The obduracy Said identifies in the Palestinian experience draws Palestinians to their interiors, seeking shelter if not safety, meaning if not permanence. Yet the text and photographs of *After the Last Sky* give voice to an unwillingness to stay inside, an unwillingness to fold beneath the pressure of the representations and expectations of their others. The little girl and the little boy in the photographs make a claim on the viewer but also on their environments, and they do so from the fragile certainty of their own presences. This desire to claim self-representation is what Said emphasizes in his reading of Mohr’s photographs. It is that capacity for self-representation that puts to the lie claims about Palestinian “unfitness” for the emergence of a democratic ethos—beyond institutions and processes.

But institutions and processes cannot overcome the lack of sovereignty over territory, over movement, over life in general. Said knew—and his later, especially post-Oslo work bore this out—that what permanence there was to be had in Palestinian existence was not to be found in Hamas or the Palestinian Authority or the Israelis or the Americans. It was, rather, a function of what Raja Shehadeh termed *sumud*, steadfastness, that is, the willingness to stay and to live. Engaging in any kind of humane politics (democratic or otherwise), that is, a politics oriented to human being rather than more narrow partisan or other interests, required transcending these critical but minimal objectives. But such transcendence is no guarantee.

The people in Said and Mohr’s work are deeply located, and Said’s text and Mohr’s photographs take us through a thick description of the worlds they inhabit. Said’s work moves from fragmentation to meaning: the photographs are connected by Said’s own story, which becomes witness to a Palestinian story and identity. He moves from the episodic to the diachronic.

In both story and photograph, narrative is tied to a conception of identity that would seem to be a prerequisite to collective political existence. We began by reading the conflict in Palestine/Israel as one in which the human had been displaced in the name of an identity narrated and in need of preservation. Where, as in the Palestine/Israel conflict, politics favors identity, it privileges a certain kind of narrative—linear, progressive, established, assumed. The privilege of identity

is that it need not be self-reflective. It is whole without such interrogation. But, the want of self-reflection easily slips into denial, not only of self, but also of the particular “other,” even the innocent other, like the children in Mohr’s photographs. Where there is no willingness to interrogate one’s own actions, there is no ground upon which to meet one’s others. Without a check on one’s own logic, violence emerges that cannot help but be, ultimately, self-destructive.

Narrative is important to a democratic ethos and to religious meaning. Telling one’s story and listening to that of others is an essential part of what it means to be a member of any community of equality. But locking our understanding of the term into one form is, as Iris Young suggested, misleading and dangerous.<sup>48</sup> Said reminds us that the battle over land is often “reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative.”<sup>49</sup> The work of Said and Mohr, on the other hand, attempts to change the terms of the encounter, resisting being caught in the need for identity and playing the master’s game. The purposes and possibilities in narrating identity have changed. Mohr’s photos and Said’s texts yield a Palestinian narrative that is non-linear, even counter-linear—a call back to an older cyclical notion of time forced upon any people denied a settled place. Such a people must live in a counter-memory, story telling culture, not a historical one. To be sure, being in the position where one has to demand the space for self-representation is to be vulnerable to the kind of ongoing dispossession and displacements that are still the lot of Palestinians in the West Bank some thirty years after *After the Last Sky* was put together. Yet, the Palestinians in the photographs have no choice but to define their space over and again, daily. The repetition unto destruction that would seem to be the stuff of modernity is countered by the repetition unto obduracy and continuity that we get in the work of Said and Mohr.

Nonetheless, there remains in this narrated Palestinian experience a sense of being trapped where someone else has put you. This, too, is the essence of the photograph, as it makes time stand still. Said and Mohr resist this in their multi-vocal, layered narrative. The communities narrated here are each struggling with what it means to be human in their context(s). The power differential between them, the differences in the capacity for agency, does not change the fundamental problem: there can be no functional politics between (or within) communities where the connection between self and other as fellow human beings and possible political partners is not recognized. In the case of Palestine/Israel, it is no longer possible to tell one community’s story without reference to the other. This is the fact that Palestinians have long known and the Israelis are now confronting. In it may well be found the possibility of a future for both communities in this small but significant bit of territory.

# NOTES

1. We are not yet talking about the kind of recognition that the literature usually seeks. Here recognition as fellow human beings is required for there to be a democratic politics. See for example Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review* 3 (May/June 2000), 107-120; and Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (Verso, 2004).
2. In Edward Said and Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky* (Columbia University Press, 1998), as elsewhere, Said's work assumes that articulating a Palestinian identity in the ordinary way is not feasible. While he uses the term in the text, he clearly means something different by it than the reader would expect. So much about established identities is assumed, implied, already established. In its pedagogical character, the content of identities consists of the stories that people tell themselves about themselves in order to make sense of their shared existence. These narratives harden over time and through experience such that to say one is "Jewish," for instance, can be done more or less unreflectively while still assuming that the hearer has a point of reference. The utterance plugs into a long history, where extraordinary pain mingles with remarkable accomplishment and resilience. That history, that narrative, gives the utterer a place to be and a space from which to speak. To be forced to articulate such an identity from scratch is a nearly impossible task. "We need to retell our story from scratch every time," Said writes, "or so we feel. What we are left with when we get to scratch

is not very much and memory will not serve" (Said, 75). But rather than conceding to the impossibility of the task, Said (with Mohr's photographs) changes the terms and even the object of the enterprise. Instead of focusing on establishing an identity per se, that is, a narrative attempting to challenge or even supplant the dominant Jewish one in Palestine, Said focuses on the actual experiences of Palestinians, namely, their presence and the ways in which that presence manifests itself in their everyday lives.

3. Said, 4.
4. David Margolis, "Who Are the Palestinians?" *My Jewish Learning*. [http://www.myjewishlearning.com/israel/Contemporary\\_Life/Israeli-Palestinian\\_Relations/The\\_Palestinians.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/israel/Contemporary_Life/Israeli-Palestinian_Relations/The_Palestinians.shtml) (accessed March 1, 2014). The Arabs of Palestine, opponents argue, "never exercised national sovereignty in the country in which they lived." They were tribal and semi-feudal "occupants of a geographical space, not members of a "nation." Even at the time of the *nakhba*, the United Nations called them a "people," like other peoples, who nonetheless found themselves re-created in the experiments of modernity. Moving from subjects of the Ottoman Empire to citizens of states, they exist only relationally—as "Palestinians with Israeli citizenship"—or as refugees.
5. Alan Godlas, personal communication, 02/05/2014.
6. Ibid.
7. This vulnerability is readily demonstrated in the aftermath of the massacres at Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon which occasioned Said's work in *After the Last Sky*. In the 1982 attacks by Maronite Christians of the Phalange party (duly overseen by the Israeli military) on the camps in Lebanon, many were massacred; others were marched out of the

camps and either executed or taken away on trucks, "never to be seen again." Not only Palestinians and Lebanese were killed, but also workers from Egypt, Syria, and Pakistan. "When asked how many Palestinians had been killed during the massacre, a Phalangist militiaman who took part in it replied, 'You'll find out if they ever build a subway in Beirut.'" Leila Shahid, "The Sabra and Shatila Massacres: Eye-Witness Reports," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32:1 (Autumn 2002), 36-58.

8. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: Macmillan, 1981). Barthes is looking at photographs of his mother, who has died. For Barthes, the photograph creates an identification of reality ("She has been") with truth ("There she is"—again and again) while, at the same time, confirming both her life and her death: "it becomes at once evidential and exclamative; it bears the effigy to that crazy point where affect (love, compassion, grief, enthusiasm, desire) is a guarantee of Being" (Barthes, 113). In the moment of looking at a photograph, one enters this cut across knowing and feeling, and there is, for Barthes, a potential enlightenment: "a *satori*" (Barthes, 50, 84, 109), an act of grace (Barthes, 109), a "madness" (Barthes, 117), an "action of thought," *noesis*, "without thought," *noeme* (Barthes, 111). Photographs open up a transparency that lets us see the depths and dimensions of persons. The photograph itself is always invisible: it is not that we see (Barthes, 6). What we see is a real being. For Barthes, a photograph, though not animated, animates; it generates adventure (Barthes, 21) because it is "an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here"

(Barthes, 80), like, as Susan Sontag put it, "the delayed rays of a star" (Barthes, 80-81).

9. Barthes, 12.
10. Barthes, 98.
11. Barthes, 85.
12. Barthes, 87.
13. Barthes, 76.
14. Barthes, 82.
15. Barthes, 53, 55.
16. Barthes, 91.
17. That is why Barthes argues that photography "has the same relation to History that the *biographeme*," as minimal unit, "has to biography." See Barthes, 91.
18. Barthes, 92.
19. Barthes, 119.
20. For example, many of the photos in the text, particularly in the section Said entitles "Interiors," bear witness to the Palestinian struggle merely to establish permanent homes, that is, homes that cannot be taken away via a new settlement, the sale of their land, home demolitions, and the like. Living this way, Said writes: "You learn a certain kind of caring for and attention to your immediate situation if you know that in time it too can become the place you will have lost forever, the place whose identity is retained only in the repeated experience of staying and then moving on. Homecoming is out of the question. You learn to transform the mechanics of loss into a constantly postponed metaphysics of return" (Said, 150). This transformation, this struggle, is the work of Palestinian life and the substance of Palestinian presence articulated in the photographs and text of *After the Last Sky*.
21. The need to articulate an identity—rather than just living lives—is a function, not so much the Jewish presence with whom they peacefully shared the land for centuries, as of the aspirations of the Zionist project and its fulfillment through the state



- of Israel. In the continuing wake of that project, both Israelis and Palestinians, Said says, suffer with self-understandings that are “soaked in the hostilities of our struggle” (Said, 44).
22. Said, 20-21.
23. Said, 61. Glenn Bowersock argues that this fragmentation has been deliberate, tearing apart a “fundamentally unified region.” This has led Palestinians to a kind of self- othering. Said recognizes that cultures “spin out a dialectic of self and other” out of which comes notions of home, heroism, and enemy (Said, 40). What has happened to the Palestinian in this othering is a break in identity. Said writes: “For Palestinian culture, the odd thing is that its ‘Palestinian’ is so charged with significance for others that Palestinians cannot perceive it as intimately theirs without a simultaneous sense of its urgent importance for others as well. ‘Ours’ but not yet fully ‘ours’” (Said, 40). This is a negative image of Detweiler’s sense that I should not be able to think my story without thinking yours—one that robs the self of true self-consciousness.
24. Said, 60.
25. Said, 14.
26. Said, 61-62.
27. Said, 129-130.
28. Said, 134.
29. Said, 123.
30. Said, 38
31. Azoulay is doing fascinating and important work on the civil contract of photography and takes the occupation and the resulting Palestinian predicament as a starting point. Subsequent considerations of the issues raised in this paper will have to take her work more into account. See Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books, 2012) and *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (Verso, 2012).
32. Said, 92.
33. Said, 93.
34. See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2006) and Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Polity, 2013).
35. Said, 93.
36. Said, 130.
37. Said, 19.
38. Said, 130.
39. Said, 63.
40. Said, 68.
41. Tellingly, the focus upon daily life and the ways in which Palestinians have to produce themselves demands that any sense of identity draw upon the presence and experiences of women. Against overly masculinized political representations of Palestinians, the constant presence of women in Mohr’s photographs demand they be seen as much more than the roles they seem to have played, that of “hyphen, connective, transition, mere incident.” Women emerge as the truer representatives of the core of Palestinian life. “Unless we are able to perceive at the interior of our life the statements women make,” Said writes, “concrete, watchful, compassionate, immensely poignant, strangely invulnerable—we will never fully understand our experience of dispossession” (Said, 77). Women take on the mantle of obduracy, even against those who would speak for what it means to be Palestinian in an exclusively masculine voice. “The smile,” Said writes of the photo of one Palestinian woman, “continues in adversity, nonetheless” (Said, 104-105). Like her people in general, the woman emerges as the breaker of accepted patterns and as the source of Palestinian self-production. In Mohr’s photographs as in her work and her person, she embodies

Said’s larger contention that being Palestinian means attending to the local, to the needs of the everyday, to the requirements of presence, and that these attentions “are in fact so many potential breaks in the seamless text, the unendingly unbroken narrative of U.S./Israeli power” (Said, 144).

42. Said, 36.
43. Ibid.
44. Said, 37.
45. Said, 36.
46. Said, 42.
47. Ibid.
48. Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 53ff., argues that narrative is only one form of political communication, along with greeting and rhetoric. Each form, we would argue building on her insight, narrates presence.
49. Said, 81.